

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 15A

PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER  
23 October 1984

# CBS contradicted by a one-time Westmoreland aide

By David Zucchini  
*Inquirer Staff Writer*

NEW YORK — An attorney for Gen. William C. Westmoreland continued to hammer away yesterday at a CBS documentary on the Vietnam War, eliciting testimony in the libel trial that challenged some assertions made in the 1982 program.

Col. Charles A. Morris, a former intelligence officer under Westmoreland, contradicted key elements of CBS' contention that Westmoreland had deceived his superiors about enemy troop strength in 1967. Westmoreland's attorney, Dan M. Burt, led Morris through more than two hours of questioning during which Morris said he knew of no orders to suppress or alter estimates of enemy strength. CBS in its documentary had cited a "conspiracy at the highest levels of military intelligence" to distort and conceal the numbers.

Under cross-examination by a CBS attorney, however, Morris made several statements that tended to support the premise of the show.

The testimony by Morris, 64, came as the second week of testimony began in the trial of the general's \$120 million libel suit against CBS.

Morris, a burly retiree with a Southern accent and a courtly manner, told Burt flatly that he was aware of no orders to keep estimates of enemy strength below a "ceiling" of 300,000. The CBS program accused Westmoreland of ordering the ceiling as part of an attempt to make it seem that the United States was winning the war.

"I never received any such order, nor was there an implication," to do so, Morris said.

Morris played a central role in the daily analyzing and reporting of military intelligence in Westmoreland's command — what the colonel called "real-time intelligence" compared with monthly reporting and analysis.

Morris disputed a CBS contention that Westmoreland suppressed intelligence reports showing that Communist infiltration into South Vietnam had risen to 25,000 troops a month in the five months preceding the Tet offensive of January 1968.

The colonel responded with a firm "no" four times, as Burt asked if he recalled any reports to Westmoreland's command giving an infiltration figure as high as 25,000 a month.

Later, Morris testified — as have other witnesses for Westmoreland — that discrepancies in estimates of enemy strength resulted from a well-known debate within the intelligence community over whether to include irregular forces in official estimates.

Burt questioned Morris at length about a September 1967 conference in Saigon at which CIA analysts and Westmoreland's intelligence officers — including Morris — argued about irregular enemy "self-defense" and "secret self-defense" forces in South Vietnam villages. He described the meeting as "a free and full exchange of ideas."

Morris said Westmoreland's top command did not arbitrarily dictate how its intelligence officers should lay out its proposals at the conference, as alleged by the CBS program. As head of the command's intelligence delegation to the meeting, Morris said he was told only to present "the best figures we could come up with" for enemy strength.

But he said the CIA analysts "wanted a higher figure than we were willing to accept," so he passed the problem "to a higher echelon" — indicating the top level of Westmoreland's command in Vietnam. A month later, the command's monthly "order of battle" report detailing enemy strength announced that the self-defense forces would no longer be included in enemy troop estimates. Describing the forces as "home guard and low-level fifth columnists," the report said eliminating them from official estimates "more accurately reflects" true enemy strength.

Asked by Burt where such reports were sent, Morris responded, "To higher intelligence headquarters." That included Westmoreland's superiors at the Pacific military command and at the Defense Intelligence Agency and the CIA in Washington, he said.

Morris also contradicted a charge made by the CBS program that Lt. Col. Everette Parkins, an intelligence officer under Morris, had been dismissed from his job because he had become "incensed" by the alleged refusal of Westmoreland's command to report the higher infiltration figures.

Under cross-examination by CBS attorney David Boies, Morris conceded that Westmoreland and other U.S. commanders in Vietnam were under "political pressure" to show progress in the war.

After long pause, Morris told Boies, "I'm going to say, yes, there was a certain amount of pressure. ... As Gen. Westmoreland said, no one likes bad news."

Morris also quoted Westmoreland as saying that he had decided in April 1967 to drop the self-defense forces from the order of battle. CBS reported that Westmoreland had begun suppressing the troop numbers after he gave a glowing report on the war's progress to President Lyndon B. Johnson in April 1967.

Boies' questioning elicited the first direct testimony on preparation of the CBS program by one of the three defendants in the trial — George Crile, the producer of the documentary. Morris was asked by Boies if he had told Crile in a telephone interview that one of Westmoreland's officers had been instructed by the general to give an optimistic evaluation of the war's progress at a Washington briefing in 1967.

He replied, "If I didn't tell him that, he could have concluded that."

CBS reported that Westmoreland's command "cooked the books" on enemy troop figures while sending optimistic reports on the war back to Washington.

Boies also got Morris to concede that he may have inadvertently misled Crile about enemy infiltration by his use of terminology. Morris said he referred to "infiltration-related activity," which he defined as southward enemy troop movements in North Vietnam and not infiltration into South Vietnam.